

WHAT GOES UP!

I was born in Springer, Oklahoma, April 7, 1921 exactly seven months after the death of my biological father. My name is Malcolm Herschel Higgins and I was raised as an only child by my mother and step-father. I graduated from the Duncan, Oklahoma High School in 1939. I volunteered for military service and was inducted in June, 1941 at the ripe old age of twenty. I enlisted to gain 'choice of service' with a term of 1 year and my choice was the Army Air Corps. I told my high school sweetheart I would return to ask her to marry me when the earth returned to some semblance to normalcy - and I did ... and she did.

The exhilarating experience of boot camp was presented to me at Kelly Field in San Antonio, Texas and on completion of the boot course I was declared a fully qualified aircraft mechanic at which assignment I worked until December 7, 1941. On that day an announcer interrupted my radio program of Glenn Miller music to inform all listeners that Pearl Harbor had been attacked by the Japanese and we were at war. It was Sunday and I was one of only a few who had not left the base. I was called and placed on guard duty, permanent in nature I was informed, until I could qualify for another job. I immediately applied for flight training and was accepted - I had always dreamed of flying an airplane since I was six years old and could nail two sticks together and pretend it was a flying machine.

Learning to fly an aircraft the Army way took seven months and 200 hours of flight time in various aircraft. Along with the flying, in ground school we were exposed to courses in Morse Code, navigation, meteorology, map reading, etc., and learned to fly the Link Trainer for instrument training. I graduated with Pilot Class 42-J with a newly created rank of Flight Officer in November, 1942 at Ellington Field in Houston, Texas. Thus was started my short career as a multi-engine military pilot.

I went through combat training in a Boeing B-17 with the 100th Heavy Bomb Group as a copilot. But instead of going to Europe the group was dispersed to various air combat training sites to instruct other embryo crews. I became an Instructor Pilot for B-17s at Blythe, California and, after three months of this duty, I assembled my own crew, went through combat training again and then flew overseas to England and became a member of the 8th Air Force. My crew was assigned to fly with the 351st Bomb Group stationed at Polebrook, Northamptonshire, England in July, 1943.

After four completed and three aborted missions, I was shot down on the fifth mission while dropping bombs on the ball bearing factories of Schweinfurt, Germany on October 14, 1943 and became a guest of the Third Reich. I spent a year and a half as a POW in camps Stalag Luft III and Stalag VII-A. Patton's third armored moved over our camp April 29, 1945 and I was again free. The Air Corps then flew us to Camp Lucky Strike at Le Harvre, France for thorough physical exams and quick rehabilitation. Two weeks later we were placed aboard a Liberty Ship and taken to Camp Miles Standish in Massachusetts, loaded on a train and taken to San Antonio, Texas and given sixty day furloughs. On June 29, 1945 my high school sweetheart and I were married, honeymooned for a month and then reported into Coral Gables, Florida for more rehabilitation and release from active duty. After four and a half years, I was again a civilian.

My wife and I spent the next four years getting my Electrical Engineering Degree from the University of Nebraska - I was going to school using the GI Bill and she was taking care of our new family at home. Upon graduation and with my newly acquired BSEE degree in hand, I joined the IBM Corporation and spent the next 37 years at several assignments in New York, Colorado, Oklahoma, and finally California where I spent the last seventeen years as a development engineer/programmer. Our family had grown to three children and they, upon reaching adulthood, moved out of our home in Almaden Valley and started families of their own. On the last day of April, 1987, I retired and my wife and I have been enjoying our life together as we had dreamed when younger. Now, after sixty one years of happy marriage, three children, four grandchildren, and two great grandchildren, we are looking forward to several more years together in Almaden Valley enjoying the fruits of our labors through the years. — That's a wrap!